

Green Economy and Its Others: Scarcity, Rights, and Abundance

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The environmental challenge facing humanity is one aspect of a tripartite of crises:

- *Economic instability and inequality*: 35 years of fitful global economic expansion has brought material prosperity to many, but has also increased inequality.
- *Climate change and species extinctions*: deforestation rates remain unchecked and global warming accelerates while climate policy is deadlocked globally and ineffectual in most countries.
- *Hunger and threats to subsistence*: As states seek hedges against food-price surges and firms seek speculative profits, a global land rush is speeding the historical trend of farmland and livelihood losses.

“Green economy” has arisen as a proposed framework for overcoming these conditions. It is meant to use technical expertise, economic rationality, and market mechanisms to supersede politics and save capitalism from its most ecologically damaging effects. Its advocates hope it can supersede the political conflicts that have blocked climate-policy action. However, green-economy has been denounced in environmental negotiations by some national delegations. Critiques of green-economy as ecological imperialism and enclosure have been articulated forcefully by rural social movements and their civil-society allies. Plans for market-based Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and [forest] Degradation (REDD+) are meeting resistance from local communities, particularly in Latin America.

My hypothesis is that that the green-economy project would bring about a deeper and more extensive phase of globalization. At the same time, the triple crisis, especially its ecological dimension, is creating conditions for a profound paradigm shift in our understanding of the measures and meanings of human well-being and the social and economic requirements for its achievement.

Green economy as it is currently conceived overlooks potential, positive synergies between conservation, climate mitigation, food production, meaningful employment, and

equity. As critical scholarship is beginning to grasp and new social movements are demonstrating, other understandings of green economies are possible. Indigenous and peasant movements have expressed this in the slogan, “No ecology without equity; no equity without ecology.” Rather than presuming that the productive use of landscapes is inimical to conservation, this approach relies on active participation of rural communities as co-producers of vital ecosystem services as well as food.

These movements are attempting to create new forms of governance, new conceptualizations of rights, and new forms of food, energy, and cultural sovereignty. Some endorse the goal of ‘living well’ (*buen vivir*, *sumak kawsay*, *inter alia*) as an alternative ethos to that of ever-increasing material consumption. Their visions challenge the conventional consensus that economic growth, green or otherwise, is the *sine qua non* of human progress. They are widening the cracks in long-hegemonic ideologies on the both the left and the right, creating a discursive and political space in which alternative possibilities become imaginable.